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ABSTRACT

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), Appalachia Educational Laboratory staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest supports and investigates ongoing school improvement efforts through rallies, summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This report describes and assesses an elementary school network rally and a Quest Scholars meeting held in February 1999 in Lexington, Kentucky. Teams of students, teachers, parents, and administrators from each of six elementary schools attended the rally, for a total of 28 participants, and 5 Quest Scholars attended their meeting. Rally activities included a demonstration of the California Protocol, an interactive process to engage the entire school in the school improvement process; a session on brain-based learning; and alignment of teams' school improvement plans with Quest support activities. Evaluation data were generated by evaluator participant observation, unstructured interviews, and three feedback forms. Data indicate that the rally's six goals--connect with colleagues, create a learning community, connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, create personal and shared meaning, commit to continue learning with this community, and commit to continue this Quest back home--were met very well; connecting with colleagues and commitment to the Quest learning community were achieved best. Appendices include the Quest brochure and framework for continuous improvement, feedback forms, information on the Protocol process, and the evaluation standards checklist. Contains 19 references. (Author/TD)

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Evaluation of Quest Elementary School Rally, February 1999

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Evaluation of Quest Elementary School
Rally, February 1999

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Evaluation of Quest Elementary School Rally, February 1999

Caitlin Howley-Rowe

April 1999

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This evaluation report describes and assesses one elementary school network rally, convened February 22-23, 1999, in Lexington, Kentucky. In addition, this report documents a three-hour Quest Scholars meeting held on February 21, 1999.

Twenty-eight participants attended, as well as four AEL staff members. Six elementary network schools sent teams ranging from two to seven members. One school also brought four students to participate in a demonstration of the Protocol, a technique for examining student work, although they did not take part in other rally activities. Eighteen participants were teachers, five were parents, and five were school building administrators. Seven of the 21 respondents to a final evaluation form indicated having attended three or more Quest events, ten had attended one or two events, and four had attended no other project gatherings. Of the 28 participants, five were men and 23 were women. Three might be considered African American, one Latina, and the remainder white.

The rally was evaluated in terms of whether, and to what extent, the conference goals were met. To this end, a variety of data were gathered: field notes were taken during evaluator participant observation of all conference activities, participants completed three feedback forms, and unstructured interviews were conducted throughout the rally. The rally goals included: (1) to connect with colleagues, (2) to create a learning community, (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, (4) to create personal and shared meaning, (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, and (6) to commit to continue the Quest back home.

Analysis of the feedback data revealed that participants thought the rally goals had been very well met. On a 5-point Likert-type scale, mean ratings of the degree to which goals were achieved ranged from 4.65 to 4.40. Most well-achieved, with identical mean ratings of 4.65, were the goals concerning connecting with colleagues and committing to continue learning with the Quest community. Less well-achieved was the goal concerning commitment to continue the Quest back home, although with a mean rating of 4.40, respondents nonetheless indicated that the goal had been met. Qualitative data tended to support the positive quantitative assessments of the rally.

Based upon the data, the evaluator concluded that the rally had continued to provide support, encouragement, and collegial connection to those undertaking continuous school improvement. Recommendations included offering techniques and support for specific improvement efforts at network schools, further structured and informal means for network communication, assessing participant information needs, and ensuring adequate time for school team planning.

INTRODUCTION

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) staff designed the Quest project (see Appendix A). Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools.

In the summer of 1996, Quest staff at AEL began working with teams from school communities in three West Virginia county school districts to invigorate efforts for continuous school improvement, using a variety of techniques for gathering input from all those with a stake in their local schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998g). This first "learning community," called Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE), was comprised of school teams including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Ultimately, this group wrote individual school visions and improvement plans, and co-authored (with AEL) *Creating Energy for School Improvement* (1997), a supplemental guide for those poised to write their own state-mandated school improvement plans.

Quest staff also were committed to creating learning communities devoted to exploring continuous school improvement across the AEL region of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Hence, staff scheduled a pilot Inquiry Into Improvement conference in April 1997 for selected region high schools. Schools were selected in several ways. Some schools were recommended for the Quest experience by central office staff or school administrators. Other schools were asked to join Quest because they had participated in previous AEL programs. Still other schools were invited because Quest staff believed they were primed for the kind of collaborative inquiries into school improvement that Quest was designed to provide.

In October 1997, in Roanoke, Virginia, another conference was held for designated high schools in AEL's region, this time with an explicit emphasis on forming and nurturing a network of schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998c). A similar conference was held in Nashville, Tennessee, for designated region elementary schools in November 1997 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a). In order to facilitate the development of a Quest school network and to continue to help invigorate continuous school improvement efforts within network schools, staff planned a sequence of events in 1998 following these initial conferences. Dissatisfied with the conventional and prescriptive connotation of "conference," Quest staff chose to call these network meetings "rallies." Thus, all events previously called conferences are now termed "rallies."

The high school network met a second time on February 8-10, 1998, at the Pipestem State Park Resort in West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1998d), following which the elementary school network participated in a rally on February 22-24, 1998, in Lexington, Kentucky (Howley-Rowe, 1998b). During the summer, 11 network members participated in the Quest Scholars Program, meeting at a colloquium in Charleston, West Virginia, on July 16-18, 1998, to collaborate with

project staff in ongoing efforts to conceptualize, design, and research Quest (Howley-Rowe, 1998e). And in August, network members and other educators in AEL's region participated in a symposium on assessment of student work (Howley-Rowe, 1998f).

From the high school network rally in October 1997 to the August 1998 summer symposium, the Quest network contained an essentially stable membership, although there were differences in the number of school teams attending each event and in the frequency that school teams attended gatherings, a phenomenon project staff have undertaken to study. During this period, Quest staff hosted six network events.

Beginning their second year of network activity, Quest staff invited the elementary and high school networks to attend a rally together on November 2-3, 1998, at the Glade Springs Resort, near Daniels, West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1999a). Approximately half of the Quest Scholars met on November 1, 1998, to plan with project staff several rally activities. Scholars from the high school network met for three hours on February 14, 1999, prior to a high school network rally held on February 15-16 in Roanoke, Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1999b). A similar rally was held for elementary network members on February 22-23, 1999, in Lexington, Kentucky. This report describes the elementary level Scholars meeting and summarizes evaluation of the elementary school rally.

The primary audience for this report is Quest staff. It is intended to provide information to staff as they make decisions about future rallies and the development of the network. In addition, this report will be part of an ongoing series of reports about Quest events (Howley-Rowe, 1998a-g, 1999a-b). This series will document the evolution of the Quest network and the process whereby staff strive to enable continuous school improvement. Consequently, this report may also prove useful to others interested in building networks or promoting school improvement over time.

One purpose of this report is to assess whether, and to what extent, rally goals were met. The six major goals discussed in earlier reports are also analyzed here: (1) to connect with colleagues, (2) to create a learning community, (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, (4) to create personal and shared meaning, (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, and (6) to commit to continue the Quest back home. In addition, description and analysis of the rally provided in this report contribute to ongoing documentation of the Quest project and of the development of the Quest network.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this evaluation component of the Quest project were primarily qualitative, although some quantitative data were also collected and analyzed. During the rally, the evaluator engaged in participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Emerson, 1983; Glazer, 1972; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980), a method highly suited "for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Furthermore, consistent with the Quest paradigm, participant observation involves "a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied constantly is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This method "is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their . . . experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156), thereby enabling researchers to evaluate how an event or process appears and feels to participants. By "exploit[ing] the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which this process gives rise," participant observation further produces data that is both rich and valid (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 8).

During this rally, the evaluator played a role more akin to what Denzin typifies as "observer as participant," rather than as a complete participant observer (1989). That is, the evaluator's contact with rally attendees was not as a participant in the activities in which they were engaged, but instead as a roaming onlooker and occasional conversationalist. The evaluator sat in on participant group endeavors, watched the large group as the rally unfolded, shared evening entertainment activities, and took advantage of serendipitous occasions to chat with participants.

In order to corroborate the theses generated by participant observation, the evaluator also analyzed data from the feedback forms designed by Quest staff soliciting participant assessment of the process (see Appendix B). Using several data sources in order to corroborate theses is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research" or "triangulation." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. Hence, in addition to participant observation, three evaluation forms were used to collect further information. One feedback form asked attendees to discuss their experiences during the first day of the rally. This form asked participants to record: "Learnings, insights, ah-ha's from the day," "Ways in which I contributed," "Things I want to explore further," "Things that worked especially well for me," "Things that would have allowed me to contribute more," and "Things to trash." Another feedback form was distributed at the end of the rally and asked participants for their evaluations of specific activities, including demonstration of the California Protocol, review of network schools' improvement plans, review of brain-based learning research, and use of the Quest self-scoring profile. This form also included a quantitative assessment of the degree to which participants thought the rally goals had been achieved, using a 5-point Likert scale. A third form posed open-ended questions concerning specific examples of ways each of the rally goals had been met.

A third data collection method included unstructured interviews conducted during the course of the rally. As opportunities arose for relatively private conversation, participants were asked to discuss their assessments of the rally generally. Interview responses were later coded and analyzed by theme.

Analyses of participant observation field notes, interview data, and evaluation form responses were made by theme or question, as most appropriate. Themes were coded, and responses within each theme were tabulated. Field notes were condensed for inclusion in the descriptive section of this report.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this report for participant and school names in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those involved in the Quest network.

SCHOLARS MEETING

Five elementary school network Quest Scholars attended the February 21 meeting facilitated by two project staff members. Four Scholars were women, one a man. Two were principals, and three teachers. One might be considered African American, the remainder white.

The Quest Scholars were to meet at the Wyndham Garden Hotel in Lexington, Kentucky from 2:30 until 5:50 p.m. in a small meeting room. However, project staff did not begin the proceedings until 3:07 because two of the five Scholars were late arriving. In the interim, staff and participants chatted, joked, and snacked informally as a Mozart CD played in the background.

One of the latecomers arrived at 2:53, and staff decided to begin the meeting officially at 3:07. A facilitator wrote the topics to be addressed on the marker board at the front of the room. Topics were Quest creed—where do we go from here; school journal (portfolio) development—documentation of journey, data collection; engagement study; summer symposium; Scholars colloquium; Scholars program 1999-2000; and agenda for the rally. As she did so, the Scholars continued to chat informally, one asking a project staff member about "our high school friends."

Just as a facilitator began to describe the agenda, the second latecomer arrived, laughingly sharing her tale of getting lost along her journey to the hotel. Once she settled into a chair, the facilitator began again, discussing the history of the creeds developed by participants of the two networks. The facilitator added that her purpose in discussing the creeds was, "We are bringing them back to the Scholars to ask what's next." She went on to describe the high school network Scholars' preference for a combined creed and their suggestion of a technique for assessing this possibility across both networks.

Asked for their feedback about this, the Scholars indicated their agreement. One Scholar said, "It seems we should be able to agree on common [ground]." Another Scholar remembered a suggestion from participants at the combined rally in November 1998 to construct a combined creed with subsections specific to each network. The Scholars then discussed their concerns that the creeds were too long and lacked "a language common to all, including parents and kids." One participant summed up their conversation, offering that the creeds "need[ed] to be combined and shortened."

Beginning at 3:25, Quest staff recounted decisions made thus far about schools' documentation of their growth during participation in the network in "journal[s] of the journey," which they hoped to publish in a book about the project. Such documentation would also "enable evaluation of Quest, especially student outcomes." They added that there was "no prescribed form[s]" for such documentation, but that they "have come up with a philosophy and format . . . that your involvement in Quest should enhance what you were doing anyway at your school." They then

went on to share a planning worksheet they had prepared to assist teams align their local school improvement goals with Quest activities and to collect data about their progress toward such goals. "[We] see this as a planning sheet that would eventuate into this journal, or log of your journey," documenting school improvement for each school and "help[ing] to meet the project's need for evaluation." Quest staff also noted that this effort was encouraged by Scholars' recommendation that schools be held more accountable to the project for their improvement work.

Scholars were asked for their reaction to the worksheet. One replied, "One of the things Quest does for us is give us a retreat atmosphere . . . an opportunity to focus energy on the task at hand without phones ringing or needing to get home because the babysitter's time is up . . . [I think] this will help us embellish the integrity of our three goals in our plan." Quest staff replied that they hoped Quest "is value-added for you."

The Scholars then discussed in more detail their appreciation of the project. Offered one, "The readings help us see things in a different way . . . Wheatley has been really significant to us." She added, "One of the most difficult things to do in a social organization is to show cause and effect relationships," referring to plans for schools to document their Quest journeys. A facilitator replied, "Well, Wheatley says that there are no cause and effect relationships. We don't believe everything in your school is directly because of Quest." Another Scholar offered that a "good thing about Quest is it regenerates . . . . [It] confirms you because you [Quest staff] come here, you've read so much and know what you're doing, and look at us and say we're on the right track . . . and it is confirming."

A facilitator reoriented the discussion, first praising the diversity of Scholar perspectives and then adding her hope that "school teams will really get into it [documenting their growth] . . . . [We] hope that you will see what you can notch up in your plans."

One Scholar voiced his concern: "My problem with this is being able to tie two separate segments. On one side is school culture, community. Then on the other side you have what people in the community are really looking at—test scores . . . . I'm not so sure if we did every one of these [activities designed to address Quest framework components] . . . test scores might not reflect this." He contributed an anecdote about test scores dropping after implementation of an inquiry-based science program. A facilitator asked how long the program was implemented; the Scholar replied that they continued to use the program, noting, "Scores are up but [it's] because we have pulled back on some parts of inquiry."

The Scholars then discussed their perspectives on the connection between achievement and instruction, classroom climate, and student motivation, and the disjunction between test-taking and meaningful learning. A facilitator acknowledged the Scholars' concerns, saying, "It will be a challenge [to link student achievement to activities related to Quest]. But we hope we can think together about how these things make a difference."

Staff next described their small study of what influences schools' engagement with the Quest network, announcing that participants would be asked to take part in focus group interviews the next day. The summer symposium, to be held July on 26-27 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, was also announced. Staff described the various topics they were considering for symposium sessions: student motivation, project-based learning, Interdisciplinary Teamed Instruction (ITI), active learning strategies, emotional intelligence, student-led conferences, brain-based learning principles, and a possible poster session for network schools to present their efforts. Scholars discussed the issues of depth versus breadth of topics, and the facilitators voiced their anticipation that Scholars would take an active part in planning and presenting sessions at the symposium.

The Scholars colloquium was also announced. To be held from July 12-14 at Mountain Lake, Virginia, the colloquium this year would differ significantly from the first colloquium, in that "[We] hope there will be time to do some thinking and writing for a book modeled somewhat on Senge's *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* . . . with some theory, the framework, stories." "This is all to say," added one Quest staff member, "that we want a retreat setting . . . and do you want to re-up [your participation]?" Two Scholars mentioned schedule conflicts they might confront, and Quest staff noted these.

A facilitator then asked Scholars their opinion of the book they were planning. One replied that it sounded "exciting." Another said, "The synergism of putting the group in one place, distraction free, would result in a product better than what I might try to pull together myself."

Then, a staff member introduced a new Quest tradition, the Giraffe Award, and described the book from which she had drawn the inspiration for it. She noted that giraffes were symbolic in several ways: they take risks ("sticking out one's neck"); they are oriented toward community (being animals who travel in herds); they stop to graze, symbolizing reflection along one's journey; they are able to survey the "big picture" from their lofty vantage point; and they stand out in a crowd, again due to their height. After describing procedures for nominating participants for the award, she then quickly described the rally agenda and discussed the evening's dinner plans.

The group then relaxed for a few moments together, sharing stories and generally catching up with each other. One Scholar asked another for information about multi-age classrooms at her school and began to arrange a site visit for observation. The group dispersed at 5:30.

RALLY ACTIVITIES

Day One

The elementary school network rally began at 8:00 a.m. February 22, 1999, at the Wyndham Garden Hotel in Lexington, Kentucky. Twenty-eight participants attended, as well as four AEL staff members. Six elementary network schools sent teams ranging from two to seven members. One school also brought four students to participate in a demonstration of the Protocol, a technique for examining student work, although they did not take part in other rally activities. Of the participants, 18 were teachers, five were parents, and five were school building administrators. Responses to a query on one of the final evaluation forms concerning the number of Quest events previously attended indicated that seven of the 21 respondents had attended three or more; ten had attended one or two events; and four had attended no other project gatherings. Of the 28 participants, five were men and 23 were women. Three might be considered African American, one Latina, and the remainder white.

The rally activities took place in a conference room in the hotel. At the front of the room were tables arranged perpendicularly to each other and at an angle from one corner. On the tables were paper, pens, tape, scissors, reading materials, and an overhead projector. Participants sat at round tables clustered near the front of the room. On the tables were baskets filled with supplies and bags with various toys, as well as pots of African violets. Throughout the rally, the room temperature fluctuated between uncomfortably cold and hot. Facilitators made repeated efforts to convince hotel staff to adjust the thermostat adequately, but the temperature did not stabilize well into the second day of activities.

After welcoming attendees at 8:03 a.m., the rally facilitators invited participants to engage in an introductory activity. In the activity, attendees were to find partners with whom to share accounts of occurrences at their schools that had generated excitement or energy. Participants stood up from the tables at which they had been seated, made eye contact with potential partners, and then met to discuss their accounts. The conference room filled with conversation from 8:15 until 8:25, when the facilitators requested that participants return to their seats and write the stories they shared on large index cards.

After 10 minutes of quiet writing, attendees were asked to decide with which of the six Quest framework components their stories most closely corresponded. A facilitator briefly reviewed the framework. Then, participants were requested to write their names on small Post-it note paper and place the paper on a depiction of the framework component most closely associated with their stories. Attendees placed most Post-it notes on the framework components of enabling SMART learners and broadening the learning community, while only one Post-it note was placed on the component of strengthening the learning culture.

At 8:50, attendees were asked to share their stories with their school team members, and then designate one member to sign the large Quest time line and write a brief description of recent school accomplishments. The facilitators collected the cards on which participants had written their stories at 8:56 and next requested that a member from each team report on activities at their school since the last rally.

The first school to report noted that student-led parent-teacher conferences had been expanded to include third through fifth grades, with much success. The award of an approximately $300,000 21st Century Community Learning Center grant was the major event at another school. Team members reported that their small, rural school was now able to offer an after-school program four days per week, including piano, gymnastics, karate, and basketball instruction, through the grant award. Community support for the endeavor, team members added, was evident in that parents provided transportation for their children from the after-school program despite the obstacles in so doing that many poor, rural residents confront. A third school announced that they had received funding for a new addition to their facility. Other events included a Quest co-venture during which parents participated in Interview Design, the institution of portfolio use, and a "great science fair."

A fourth school reported that they continued to use the Quest framework component of enabling SMART learners as a school theme. In addition, they were chosen as a Blue Ribbon school, received double KIRIS rewards, and had sent their jump rope team on tour to North Carolina. Following this report, one of the facilitators requested that the team present a video they, students, and a parent employed by the local public broadcasting station produced about their school. The video, of high quality, depicted students and faculty discussing the quality of education received at the school. Participants applauded the video enthusiastically afterwards.

Three grants were awarded another school for the expansion of their computer and technology lab. School community members were planning to create a digital presentation for open-house activities using their new equipment, and in order to integrate the new technology into their teaching, teachers were required to write at least four lesson plans with technology explicitly included. A final school team reported their preparations for their annual community festival, the success of their second year in a K-12 consolidated school building, their use of money saved through consolidation for community enhancement activities such as supplementation of field trips and balloons for hospitalized students, and the acquisition of many new computers.

At 9:30, a facilitator introduced a "new Quest tradition," the Giraffe Award, amidst some participant laughter. Giraffes, she explained, were symbolic in several ways: they take risks ("sticking out one's neck"); they are oriented toward community (being animals who travel in herds); they stop to graze, symbolizing reflection along one's journey; they are able to survey the "big picture" from their lofty vantage point; and they stand out in a crowd, again due to their height. Participants were then asked to nominate another network member for the award who evinced the giraffe-like qualities noted. To do this, attendees wrote nominees' names on index cards, which were placed in a small box. A card was to be drawn from the box at the end of the day's activities.

The facilitators previewed the rally agenda and activities beginning at 9:34. They noted that schools would share their stories and experiences; that Quest staff would review the Quest framework and a self-assessment instrument based on the framework, and offer an orientation session for participants new to the network; that attendees would learn together about brain-based learning research and the Protocol process; and that school teams would be provided time for action planning. Following this explanation, attendees were given a break from 9:40 until 9:50.

At 9:50, a Quest staff member talked about her involvement with the School Change Collaborative (SCC), a collaborative group coordinated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) interested in part by the challenge of bringing student voice into the change process and promoting the growth of learning communities within schools. She added that through the SCC she had learned of the Protocol process, and then she introduced Fred[1], an elementary school principal who decided to use the process in his school.

Fred began his discussion with an allegory about turkeys receiving a day of staff development to learn how to fly. By the end of the day, he continued, the turkeys had gained confidence and were flying all around the room; afterwards, they walked home. Participants laughed loudly at Fred's story. Then Fred went on to say that what had struck him about the Protocol process was that it offered a means for examining and discussing student work. In all his time as an educator, from teacher to central office staff, he said he "had never really examined actual pieces of student work!" Although he did not immediately find the Protocol process compelling and applicable to his school, he later decided to pilot the process with his staff to discuss writing instruction and assessment. He added that the benefits of the process included "forced reflection and [it] forces [you] to stay on task."

Using an overhead projector, Fred then explained to participants the Protocol process, roles, and assumptions (see Appendix C) and introduced several teachers from his school who would next model the process. At 10:14, four teachers convened at the front of the conference room, two of whom would undertake the role of analysts, or discussants, while the other two would act as reflectors, providing both supportive and more critical feedback to the analysts. The two analysts shared samples of student writing with the other Quest participants, and then went on to discuss whether and how the samples had improved over time. The analysts spoke quietly, however, making it difficult for some attendees seated near the back of the room to hear them. At one point, one such attendee requested they speak more loudly; after a few moments of more audible speaking, the analysts returned to their quieter discussion, however.

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[1]Pseudonyms are used throughout this report in place of personal and school names in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

The demonstration of the Protocol process ended at 10:40, at which time a facilitator asked other attendees if they had any questions concerning the process. There were none, and so the facilitator requested that the four teachers who had demonstrated the process share some of their reflections on it. They noted that they had been reluctant to use the process at first, but that over time they saw that it enabled them to think more fully about writing and the structure of their writing assignments. Other benefits included "spend[ing] more time on writing" in the classroom and "sharing ideas with each other." Fred asked the teachers what they thought the difference was between using the Protocol process and "just talking." They replied that it "forces you to talk and reflect" and it enables "better use of time."

Following this, other attendees asked several questions about the process and how it might be used in various situations. At one point, Fred noted that teachers at his school had asked if they were doing the Protocol correctly. In reply, he asked them whether they were thinking more about student writing than they ever had before. When they responded affirmatively, he told them that was what mattered. A facilitator brought the discussion to a close at 11:01, with applause and a "thank you." Attendees took a short break until 11:09.

Participants reconvened, moving their chairs into a large circle near the rear of the room as requested by Quest staff in order to observe four fourth grade students from Fred's school participate in a version of the Protocol process. Fred introduced the demonstration, noting that use of the process with students began when a teacher, Rhonda, running the after-school program adapted it. In addition, the teacher had ensured that "diverse learners" participated. Fred then thanked the students for attending and turned over the proceedings to Rhonda.

Rhonda introduced the students, two African American boys and girls, who were to demonstrate the Protocol process to discuss stories they had written. After two students, acting as analysts, read and briefly discussed their stories, Rhonda prompted them by asking them to answer the question, "How did I develop my main idea and content?" After replying to the question, the other two students, as reflectors, provided some warm feedback. Next, the students switched roles and repeated the process. Following this, Rhonda guided the students through an adaptation of the process, in which all four talked together about their stories and responded to her prompts for cool, or more critical, feedback. She also asked each student what grade they would give their own paper.

The demonstration concluded at 11:30, amidst applause and praise for the students. A facilitator then asked that the students participate in a Fishbowl process, sitting in a small discussion circle as others looked on. The facilitator explained that one chair in the circle was empty to allow one onlooker at a time to join the Fishbowl to ask a question of the participants. One of the facilitators began by asking "How has it felt for your classmates to read your work?" Replies included, "It's fun. It helps me with ideas, so I feel better about what I wrote," and "It lets me help others and others help me." Another question was "When you're doing a Protocol, have you ever thought that a story was not very good? Was it hard? What did you do?" Responses included, "I just told them," "I gave them ideas out of what they had," "Sometimes I kept it to myself," and "Ms.

Effington helps us not be nervous." A facilitator asked, "How does it feel when friends give you suggestions?" One student answered, "I'm glad. [I] always need some help, even if [I] don't like [it] . . . to help my story be better." Another replied, "[I] feel like other kids want our stories to be interesting." The discussion concluded at 11:50.

A facilitator then distributed to the participants copies of a letter one of the students had written inviting them to attend an event at which Fred was to eat worms as an Accelerated Reader award. The student read the letter aloud, and a facilitator presented gifts to the students.

At 11:55, attendees were asked to return to their school teams to discuss ways in which they might use the Protocol process. At 12:00, lunch was served.

The group reconvened at 1:07 p.m. Fred summed up his school's experience with the Protocol process, reiterating that it had been useful to "diverse learners." A facilitator commented that after observing the use of Protocol at Fred's school, she realized that students there had begun to think of their writing as "their own." Following this, school teams were allotted further time to discuss ways they might use the process in their own schools.

At 1:25, Quest staff asked whether school teams wished to share their ideas. Only one school team replied, saying they might use the process to discuss quality control of the products produced through their Microsociety program.

From 1:28 until 1:40, attendees answered the Quest self-scoring profile. In addition, they circled items that were unclear and underlined ambiguous words or phrases. The room was quiet as participants worked.

At 1:40, a Quest staff member explained that the profile might be useful to schools as a means to track their development in terms of each of the Quest framework components. She then directed attendees to convene in role-alike groups to get acquainted, discuss how results from administration of the self-scoring profile might be useful to their particular role, and talk about what items on the Profile were troubling or unclear. The various groups talked until 2:10, at which point they were asked to report their discussions to the larger group.

Participants offered a number of comments about the self-scoring profile. Some teachers reported that they were uncomfortable using the instrument to evaluate their entire school. Others felt unequipped to provide responses to items asking them to assess whether "all" school community members engaged in various practices. One group of teachers suggested that the directions for completing the Profile include a note that the data thereby gathered were perceptual. A group of parents felt that parents completing the Profile had less information about their children's school than teachers and administrators might, and thus would have difficulty answering some of the items. Another critique was that the questions were "too broad," while yet another was that, if parents were asked to respond to the instrument, directions ought to clearly indicate for what purpose the data

were being collected. The use of educational jargon was likewise questioned by parents. Administrators expressed concerns about the length of the Profile, the language used, and the lack of any open-ended queries. But they also thought that the instrument would be useful to compare the perceptions of various subgroups within the school community as well as to make comparisons over time.

The facilitators thanked participants for their comments, communicating their intention to revise the profile. At 2:35, attendees were requested to reconvene in their school teams to begin aligning their Quest endeavors with goals from their school improvement plans. First, however, Quest staff conducted an activity with balloons to re-energize participants; attendees appeared to enjoy the energizer, laughing enthusiastically and teasing one another.

At 2:46, the facilitators provided the rationale for aligning school improvement plans with Quest activities: "We hope you never do something just because it is a Quest activity. We want the activities you conduct to be supported by Quest." Then they asked that school teams examine their plans to determine "what in your plans can be supported by Quest." The facilitators provided 30 minutes for the activity and a worksheet to assist in the planning process.

Teams worked intently, reading their improvement plans and discussing which goals might best correspond to Quest activities. Many teams began to complete the worksheet provided by Quest staff. By 3:20, the facilitators asked participants to wrap up their discussions and added that time would be allotted the next day for continued planning. In addition, teams would be offered the opportunity to discuss their plans with another team using the Protocol process.

Participants were then asked to participate in one of three focus groups in order to provide data for Quest research concerning schools' initial and sustained involvement in the network. Meanwhile, participants new to the Quest network participated in a more in-depth orientation to the project. Participants in the focus groups and the orientation session were then asked to complete an evaluation form concerning their experience of the first day of the rally.

Following the focus groups and the introductory session, attendees reconvened in the conference room for the presentation of the Giraffe Award, amidst applause and apparent amusement. In addition, three team members from one school announced that they needed to return to their school to assist with the implementation of a new grant; the facilitators and other participants said good bye and then adjourned for the evening.

Day Two

The second day of the rally began after breakfast at 8:01 with a welcome from the facilitators and some informal conversation about the previous night's activities. Then at 8:10, the facilitators distributed a form with items from both the elementary and high school creed statements written at earlier rallies. The form requested that respondents rate the importance of each item. The items, however, were not printed in such a way as to reveal from which level creed statements they were drawn, as the purpose of the activity was to assess the relevance of each item regardless of level; participants had disagreed at the combined high school and elementary network rally in November, 1998 about whether to create a combined creed for both networks. Quest staff noted that the Scholars intended to use the data gathered during this activity to revise the creeds.

After attendees completed the activity, the facilitators briefly reviewed the agenda. At 8:21, participants were asked to count off by six in order to join one of six groups. Each group was to read an excerpt concerning one of the six Quest framework components and then plan a presentation about what the component might mean to schools.

The six groups worked until 9:29, reading about their respective components, discussing the topic, and then planning their presentations. The presentations included a poem read in unison, a skit, a demonstration of a reading lesson, and a game. Attendees applauded following each presentation, and laughed during those that were intended to be amusing.

From 9:47 until 10:12, Quest staff discussed the Scholars program and the summer symposium. They communicated the dates for each, as well as the sessions likely to be offered at the symposium. Attendees were then given a break.

Reconvening the group at 10:35, one of the facilitators asked school teams if they had formulated questions to address during the Protocol process to be conducted in the afternoon; few had. Next, after introducing some facts about the brain and findings from research on the brain and learning, the facilitators requested that attendees convene in role-alike groups. Each group was given a scenario to read that incorporated findings from brain research about what best supports learning. After reading their scenario, each group was to discuss current practices with regard to brain-based learning principles, what impediments stood in the way of implementing such practices, and how brain-based principles might be used to enable SMART learners.

The groups read and talked until 11:35, at which point the facilitators requested that each provide a brief report of their conversation. Quest staff wrote participant comments under one of two columns (brain-based principles planned for implementation and impediments to implementation) on large pieces of butcher paper.

At 11:46, the facilitators broadened the discussion, asking attendees, "What ah-ha or insight did you develop as you read and discussed," and then writing their replies on a Mindmap, a visual depiction of how ideas are interconnected. Much of the discussion centered on how to incorporate the practice, supposed to enhance brain functioning, of drinking water throughout the day into the classroom without undue disruption.

Participants were dismissed for lunch at 12:10. During lunch, many attendees noted the falling snow; several teams made plans to leave the rally early in order to avoid driving in inclement weather in the evening. Attuned to participant concerns about the worsening weather, Quest staff decided to adjourn the rally following lunch.

Reconvening the group at 12:54, the facilitators announced that the rally would be adjourned shortly. Participants were asked to complete evaluation forms, indicate dates during which they would not be able to attend the next rally, and provide to Quest staff completed worksheets documenting which school improvement goals school teams intended to align with project activities. The facilitators then thanked attendees and wished them safe travels home.

FINDINGS

Achievement of Rally Goals

The extent to which rally goals were achieved at the February elementary school network rally is discussed in this section. Data are drawn from participant observation, two open-ended feedback forms, one form soliciting both qualitative and Likert-type quantitative feedback, and informal interviews.

Participants were requested to complete three feedback forms at the rally. Twenty-three of the 28 attendees completed the first form, distributed at the end of the first day's activities, representing a return rate of 82%. Two forms were distributed at the conclusion of the rally. One form posed only open-ended queries; 21 participants completed this, for a return rate of 75%. The second posed both qualitative and quantitative questions; 20 completed this questionnaire, representing a return rate of 71%. Response rates were likely impacted by the early exit of several participants after the first day of activities and by disorganization caused by the early dismissal of the rally.

The open-ended final feedback form asked participants to denote their role. Of the 21 respondents who completed this form, 12 were teachers, four parents, and five school administrators. Too, attendees were asked how many prior Quest events they had attended. Four were new participants and had attended no previous events, although they were employed by schools already in the network. Ten had participated in one or two other Quest gatherings, while seven had been involved in three or more.

Participants were asked on one of the two final evaluation forms to rate the degree to which each of the six rally goals had been met, using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale offering response options from 1 ("not accomplished") to 5 ("extremely well accomplished"). The results are displayed in Table 1. Responses received ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 5. Cronbach's Alpha revealed that the scale possessed sufficient internal consistency reliability at .88.

Goal One, to connect with colleagues, and Goal Five, to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, both received the highest mean ratings of 4.65 and the smallest standard deviations of .49 (see Table 1). These statistics indicate that participants thought with a fair amount of consistency that both goals had been well achieved. Least highly rated were Goal Six, to commit to continue the Quest back at school, with a mean of 4.40 (SD .75), and Goal Four, to create personal and shared meaning, with a mean of 4.45 (SD .60). Nonetheless, even these two means indicated that respondents felt the two goals had been well accomplished. Overall, there was only a difference of .25 between the highest and lowest mean ratings, another indication that participants felt all the goals had been well achieved at the rally.

Table 1

Participant Rating of the Achievement of Rally Goals

Goals	N	Mean	SD*
Goal One: Connect with colleagues	20	4.65	.49
Goal Two: Create a learning community	20	4.50	.61
Goal Three: Connect with concepts concerning school improvement	20	4.55	.60
Goal Four: Create personal and shared meaning	20	4.45	.60
Goal Five: Commit to continue learning with the Quest community	20	4.65	.49
Goal Six: Commit to continue the Quest back home	20	4.40	.75

*Standard Deviation

Goal One: Connect with Colleagues

This goal received one of the two highest ratings from participants on the quantitative assessment of goal achievement. With a mean of 4.65 and a standard deviation of .49, respondents thought with a fair level of consistency that the goal of connecting with colleagues had been met quite well at the rally.

Asked on the final open-ended feedback form in what ways they had connected with colleagues at the rally, one respondent did not reply to the query, five offered multiple replies, and 15 offered one response. Seven respondents mentioned the value of sharing stories and experiences, while five noted connecting through exchanging ideas. Working toward similar goals and feeling closer to one another were themes that enhanced connection with colleagues in three responses each. As one participant put it, "I feel so much more a part of the whole and less isolated." Two replies indicated that connection with colleagues was facilitated by their sense of enthusiasm and "inspiration," as one phrased it. One attendee simply wrote that connection was "very good." Four responses were idiosyncratic and thus could not be coded. Of these, one respondent reported gaining "insight into several situations," and another felt connected to other colleagues through "understanding the roles that each of us plays in educating our children."

Participant observation seemed to corroborate feedback form data indicating that attendees made satisfactory connections with each other. Interactions appeared respectful yet relaxed, and participants seemed to share their personal and professional perspectives with each other easily. And

participants found unique ways to connect with each other. For example, one school team presented a video about their school that they had produced in conjunction with students.

Goal Two: Create a Learning Community

With a mean rating of 4.50 (SD .61), respondents expressed their sense that the goal of creating a learning community had been met well at the rally.

On the open-ended feedback form, participants were asked whether Quest network members became more of a learning community at the rally and, if so, to provide some specific examples of how this happened. Three respondents did not answer this question. Sixteen replied that the learning community had been strengthened at the rally. Of these, 15 provided one or more examples of how the learning community was enhanced. Eight responses indicated that the content presented during activities had helped bolster the Quest learning community. The collaboration engaged in during various activities and discussions enhanced the learning community for three respondents, and the personal connections rendered over time were important for three other participants. As one such respondent put it, "In coming to know members better the community is strengthened." One comment noted the value of sharing stories of success to building the learning community, and a final response suggested that the respondent's own concern to "be more active in progressing our school forward" was important.

Two replies to the question were more ambivalent about the building of the learning community. One respondent wrote, "Since only two of us were able to attend this rally, we did not feel that we became more of a learning community, at this rally[.] [H]owever, we do plan to involve more faculty and parents." This comment seems to suggest that the respondent interpreted the query in terms of the school team rather than the Quest network as a learning community. A second attendee wrote of being "not sure" whether the learning community had been enhanced, but added that "inclusion of out of school parents must make some difference."

During an informal interview, a teacher implied that the Quest learning community continued to grow, reporting that she found this to be the "easiest of all the rallies to talk in groups . . . to express my own feelings." Her comment suggests that, for this participant, rallies were becoming increasingly comfortable venues for discussion and learning with colleagues.

After the first day of the rally, attendees were requested to complete a feedback form. Respondents were asked on this form in what ways they had contributed to the day's activities and interactions. It can be argued that contributions to the day's events also augmented the growing Quest learning community. Of the 19 respondents who replied to this query, 13 wrote of engaging in discussion and offering their perspectives. Two of these added that their contributions were "sincere" or "honest." Two replies mentioned the dynamic of both listening and discussing, while

three offered that their major contribution was assisting with the demonstration of the Protocol process.

Participant observation revealed various indications that attendees experienced a sense of community during the rally. Appreciative laughter and applause, Fred's willingness to share what he had learned through use of the Protocol process, attendees' apparently honest critiques of the Quest self-scoring profile, and their attentiveness to the demonstrations of the Protocol by both teachers and students all appeared to suggest that participants experienced and contributed to the Quest learning community.

Goal Three: Connect with Concepts Concerning Continuous School Improvement

Receiving a mean rating of 4.55 (SD .60), the goal of connecting with concepts related to continuous school improvement seems to have been achieved well at the rally.

In reply to a request on the final open-ended evaluation form for descriptions of specific content related to continuous school improvement with which they connected at the rally, 17 respondents mentioned at least one such concept. Eleven participants wrote of connecting with one of the techniques for engaging school community members that was demonstrated during the rally. Six replies indicated connection with information provided about brain-based learning principles; two replies with plans made to use the techniques learned; one reply with the SMART learner concept; and one reply with "the power of vision and positive leadership."

One participant, during an informal interview, mentioned specific content with which she connected during the rally. She reported that the "brain-based [information] was very exciting, very interesting . . . also the Protocol."

Attendees were also asked on the mixed method final feedback form for their assessments of how specific activities and content "worked" for them. Of the 20 respondents to this form, 14 offered positive evaluations of the Protocol process demonstration. "Vivid and real motivating," wrote one such respondent. Two respondents gave unique replies, one noting that he had participated in the demonstration and the other that the Protocol process appeared "similar to our peer conferencing." One comment could not be interpreted, and three respondents to the form did not reply to this query. There were no negative assessments of the demonstration of the Protocol process.

The comments of the team demonstrating the process certainly seem to indicate their connection with it, and the benefits accruing to their school as a result of its use. Students themselves also appeared to connect with the process and with their own writing through the process. One of their teachers reported that students engaging in the Protocol process now appeared to think of their writing as "their own" rather than as perfunctory completion of assignments.

On the other hand, when asked during the rally by facilitators to discuss ways in which the Protocol process might be applicable in their own schools, only one team reported finding a potential use for it. This perhaps signifies that attendees did not connect quite as well with the process as feedback form data suggest.

Assessments of information provided about brain-based learning research were likewise positive. Twelve respondents gave positive evaluations of this information. Comments included, "[I] appreciate the info [sic] and bibliography," "I'm really interested in learning more," and "Really made me think about how I run my classroom and will need to make improvements in some areas." Four comments were difficult to interpret, although three seemed to mention small pieces of information associated with the review of brain-based learning research. One comment was somewhat critical of the review: "I wish there had been more concrete info [sic] on this rather than general discussion of ideal situations." And three respondents to the feedback form did not reply to this question.

Asked on the mixed-method feedback form how the review of school improvement plans "worked" for them, two respondents offered critiques. One such participant felt there was "not enough time" for completion of the activity, while the second simply wrote that the review "didn't work at all." Two more replies were somewhat ambivalent, both noting that their school teams had already undertaken such review beforehand. Equivocally, one participant wrote, "I was aware." Five respondents to the form did not reply to this prompt. On the other hand, the ten remaining respondents appraised the review of school improvement plans positively. Comments included, "The time spent reviewing and documenting our progress was helpful," "Good reminder of what we need to be doing," and "[Made] us reevaluate where we are headed and come up with a more specific plan."

Eleven respondents to the final mixed-method feedback form did not reply to the query about how the use of the Quest self-scoring profile "worked," creating the highest rate of nonresponse on the form. This may be due to the relatively short amount of time devoted to this activity, which in any case was intended to provide editorial feedback to Quest staff rather than to generate data for attendees. Four replies indicated positive assessment of the use of the profile, while four others were more ambivalent. Among those ambivalent comments were "I'm still unsure how to use the results," and "I felt as if I had answered these questions before." The other two ambivalent comments suggested that the profile was too long and could be abbreviated. A final reply was difficult to interpret, although it appeared to address the purpose of the profile: "Take a look at where we are in our school improvement."

Another indication of content with which participants connected includes responses to a query on the first feedback form distributed following the first day of the rally. Asked what "things I want to explore further," 12 of the 19 respondents to this prompt mentioned wanting to learn more about using the Protocol process in their schools or classrooms. The remaining replies were

idiosyncratic and could therefore not be coded together. These unique responses included: "Dottie's school," "more team time for planning," "use of data/information from surveys," "how to implement the ideas at our school," "communication processes," "how to build a learning community. From the perspective of parents," and "assessment."

Goal Four: Create Personal and Shared Meaning

The achievement of the goal of creating personal and shared meaning received the second lowest mean rating. With a mean of 4.45 (SD .60), however, respondents felt that the goal had been well achieved.

Asked on the final open-ended feedback form to name two or three personal or shared meaning that had been created at the rally, 12 respondents chose not to reply. The responses of the nine participants who did reply were multiple and diverse. Four mentioned a learning principle based on brain research. Four responses indicated the meaning generated through discussions with other participants, while one simply gained "insight into our school and our basic problems." Another wrote of coming to believe that "the idea is also the possible," and that "there are creative, intelligent, dedicated educators in every situation, and I can benefit greatly from interacting with them."

Participants were also asked on an evaluation form distributed at the end of the first day of the rally to describe any "learnings, insights, [or] ah-ha's" they gained. Of the 20 respondents who replied to the query (two of whom offered multiple responses), 13 noted the value of learning about the Protocol process. Of these, one mentioned the meaning he gained from observing the process: "Protocol process in classroom can be used in micro reflection." Three respondents wrote of having made more meaning around Quest itself. "The whole Quest concept and how it related to our children's learning" was meaningful to one such attendee, while another reported gaining a "better understanding of Quest." Student participation during the demonstrations of the Protocol process were meaningful to three respondents, as were the opportunities for sharing amongst participants for three more respondents. One attendee cited the value of working as a school team on school goals, and one wrote of reflecting on the notion that "we are all different, but the same."

Goal Five: Commit to Continue Learning with the Quest Community

Seven respondents did not reply to the question, "To what extent do you feel committed to continuing to learn with the Quest community? For what reasons do you feel this?" on the final open-ended feedback form. Of the 14 who did respond, three provided multiple answers. Three replies indicated some level of enjoyment of working with AEL toward continuous improvement. Two responses each suggested that commitment to the project was enhanced by the benefits and the information received during Quest interactions. The personal connection with project staff were

important to the sustenance of commitment for two respondents. The remaining replies were idiosyncratic. Sharing ideas, learning together, meeting others, and experiencing personal renewal were significant themes in these responses. Other themes included the enthusiasm of Quest staff, the leadership provided by AEL, and the ongoing nature of the project. "I feel committed because we have come this far and are not finished," said one participant.

In corroboration with the written feedback, participants gave the achievement of this goal one of the two highest mean ratings, 4.65 (SD .49), on the 5-point Likert-type scale.

Goal Six: Commit to Continue the Quest Back Home

The achievement of the goal of committing to continue the Quest for continuous school improvement back at their schools received the lowest mean rating from participants. Nonetheless, with a mean of 4.40 (SD .75), respondents deemed this goal had been well met.

Asked on the final open-ended feedback form in what ways they were committed to continuing the Quest for school improvement back at their schools, 14 respondents offered brief descriptions of various plans for action, one of whom offered multiple responses, and seven did not reply. Five responses indicated that respondents intended to participate in planning activities, from "developing a comprehensive school improvement plan" to "work[ing] on school vision." Sharing information with others and using techniques learned at the rally were ways in which three respondents each intended to express their commitment to continuous school improvement at their schools. Two respondents noted specific activities they hoped to undertake once they returned to their schools. One simply reported being "very" committed to continuous improvement, and another wrote of being committed to "have SMART learners."

Suggestions for Improvement

Participants offered few suggestions for improving the rally. For instance, asked on an evaluation form following the first day of activities to describe "things that would have allowed me to contribute more," 16 of the 23 respondents did not reply and three provided answers that were intended as jokes rather than serious criticisms. The four remaining respondents suggested the following: "open groups," "if I knew more about the project," "more small group sharing," and "overcoming my own feelings of shyness."

Likewise, when asked what "things to trash," 18 of the 23 feedback form respondents did not reply, and one offered a joking response. Two participants critiqued the coffee and the bathtubs, and one the conference room temperature. A final respondent would have liked to "trash" the "extremely

lengthy discussions," suggesting that, at least for this participant, more active sessions would have been preferable.

Asked on the mixed-method final evaluation forms for their assessment of specific topics and activities, the overwhelming majority of respondents offered positive feedback. However, one respondent suggested that the presentation of material on brain-based learning research could have provided "more concrete" information. Four respondents to a prompt on the same evaluation form concerning the review of school improvement plans gave negative or ambivalent assessments about the activity as either redundant or given short shrift. And, more than half (11) of the 20 respondents to the questionnaire did not answer the prompt about the use of the Quest self-scoring profile. Of those who did reply, four offered ambivalent comments, two suggesting that the profile was too long, another that the questions were redundant, and a fourth that use of the profile results was unclear.

Overall, however, participants did not make critiques of essential components of the Quest project or of the rally in interviews, during rally activities, or on evaluation questionnaires.

Comparative Findings

Quantitative data from earlier evaluation reports (Howley-Rowe, 1999a, 1998a) can be extracted to compare respondents' ratings of the six rally goals across Quest events. Such comparisons will provide a means to evaluate the extent to which Quest events consistently meet project objectives.

It is interesting to note that mean ratings of the achievement of rally goals have changed very little over time (see Table 2). Goals One through Four remained most stable across the three rallies assessed, with the largest mean difference appearing as .12 increase in the mean rating of Goal Four between November 1997 and November 1998. The two goals concerning commitment, on the other hand, showed larger mean differences over time. The mean for achievement of Goal Five, to commit to continue learning with the Quest community, decreased by .19 in November, 1998 and then increased by .14 in February 1999, nearly approximating the mean rating received in November 1997. The most dramatic mean difference was for Goal Six, to commit to take the Quest for continuous improvement back to school, between November 1998 and February 1999, with a mean of .41.

Overall, while mean ratings of five of the six goals declined between the November 1997 and February 1999 rallies, the differences are so minimal as to have no practical significance. And, the mean rating for Goal Four, creating personal and shared meaning, increased. In sum, it appears that the achievement of project goals across events has been quite consistent.

However, it should be noted that both high school and elementary network members participated in the November 1998 rally, and thus the data represent participants from both networks. Unfortunately, data were not disaggregated by school level. Another impediment in comparing mean ratings is that no quantitative data were collected at the February 1998 rally.

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Achievement of Goals Across Rallies

	November 1997			November 1998			February 1999		
Goals	N	Mean	SD*	N	Mean	SD*	N	Mean	SD*
Goal One	33	4.71	.50	37	4.65	.68	20	4.65	.49
Goal Two	33	4.57	.55	37	4.51	.56	20	4.50	.61
Goal Three	33	4.58	.64	37	4.51	.73	20	4.55	.60
Goal Four	33	4.39	.75	37	4.51	.61	20	4.45	.60
Goal Five	33	4.70	.52	37	4.51	.65	20	4.65	.49
Goal Six	33	4.76	.49	37	4.81	.46	20	4.40	.75

*Standard Deviation

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Several conclusions about the February 1999 elementary school network may be made based upon the data collected.

It can be concluded that participants made satisfactory connections with their colleagues at the rally, as per Goal One. Furthermore, attendees continue to value and enjoy such relationships. Some participants also expressed appreciation of their personal connections with Quest staff.

The Quest learning community continued to be supported and nurtured by network members at this rally through the content shared, collaboration, and personal relationships. It can, therefore, be concluded that Goal Two, creating a learning community, was met at this rally.

Participants connected with a variety of content at the rally, especially information on brain-based learning and the demonstrations of the Protocol process. Moreover, attendees found such content very useful. Goal Three, connecting with content related to continuous school improvement, thus seems to have been achieved.

There was a relatively low response rate (57%) to an open-ended question concerning specific meaning participants created during the rally, perhaps indicating that respondents did not fully understand the query or were unwilling to communicate the meanings they created. On the other hand, a few participants did generate some personal meaning around continuous school improvement. It can be concluded Goal Four, to create personal and shared meaning, was met, although the low response rate confounds this conclusion somewhat.

Overall, participants continue to be committed to the Quest learning community, as per Goal Five. This commitment was supported by a wide variety of Quest characteristics and structures, including personal connections with project staff, learning as a group, and sharing ideas and resources.

According to quantitative data, attendees were least certain about their level of commitment to take the Quest for continuous school improvement back to their schools, Goal Six. Qualitative data, however, do not suggest that participants felt this goal was achieved to a significantly less extent than were other goals. It can be concluded, then, that participants were at least somewhat committed to continuing the journey of school improvement within their local contexts, although some of their plans to do so seemed ambiguous or provisional. In part, this may be due to the early dismissal of the rally, eliminating much of the time intended for school team planning.

Project goals were achieved with some consistency across the Quest elementary school rallies assessed. The extent to which the two goals concerning commitment—to continue learning with the Quest community and to take the Quest for continuous school improvement back to school—were achieved across elementary rallies fluctuated more than achievement of the other four goals. It could be concluded that elementary network members find commitment to Quest and to continuous school improvement somewhat more troublesome to sustain over time and under shifting circumstances.

Recommendations

Analysis of the data leads to several recommendations for Quest staff to consider as they continue to design rallies.

Commitment to continue the Quest for ongoing school improvement at network schools appears to be one of the more difficult goals to sustain over time and in local situations vulnerable to change. For upcoming rallies, Quest staff should consider offering structures or techniques for supporting schools as they undertake improvement projects. The Protocol process demonstrated at the rally and evaluated in this report appears to have been very valuable to participants interested in data collection and ongoing collegial discussion. However, project staff may also offer rally participants tools for maintaining commitment over time, such as enhanced use of the Quest listserv, processes for brokering change, and evaluation methods.

Because participants value connecting with colleagues and Quest staff so highly, staff should continue to offer both structured and informal venues for such connection. Means of sharing ideas and stories could include continued use of various groupings of attendees at events, time for school team work, opportunities for introductory activities, participant contributions to Quest publications, and structured communication via the project listserv.

Opportunities for network members to participate actively in the creation and support of the Quest learning community ought to be extended. Thus far, such opportunities have included presentations by school teams at project events, co-authoring presentations or publications with Quest staff, and the Scholars program. Other ways to offer occasions for network members to nurture the learning community might include support for members to attend co-ventures in learning to other network schools, invitations for participants to develop content for rally presentation, and asking veteran network members to conduct introductory sessions for new attendees.

Another recommendation is that Quest staff continue to provide content about continuous school improvement to network members. As in the past, such content can range from specific data collection and communication techniques, to research-based suggestions for classroom practice, to theoretical perspectives on school change. Too, project staff may want to assess network members' interests and concerns at various points to determine what content might be most useful to them.

It is unlikely that participants who report a sense of renewal or inspiration as a result of participating in a Quest event do not also create meaning around the content discussed. However, many attendees do not provide written accounts on evaluation forms of such meaning. Quest staff might therefore consider evaluating the achievement of the goal concerning meaning-making more formally via interviews rather than questionnaires.

In addition, Quest staff could offer further opportunities for participants to facilitate more explicitly the development and articulation of meaning around continuous school improvement. Such opportunities might involve debriefing sessions following project events or the publication of a Quest Log devoted to participant accounts of personal and shared meanings created at events.

Given that participants at prior events reported that action planning within their school teams would be a valuable activity (Howley-Rowe, 1998d, 1998e), Quest staff may want to devote more time near the beginning of rallies for school teams to convene. Such a structure might have enhanced participants' sense of commitment to continue their ongoing school improvement efforts despite the early dismissal of the rally.

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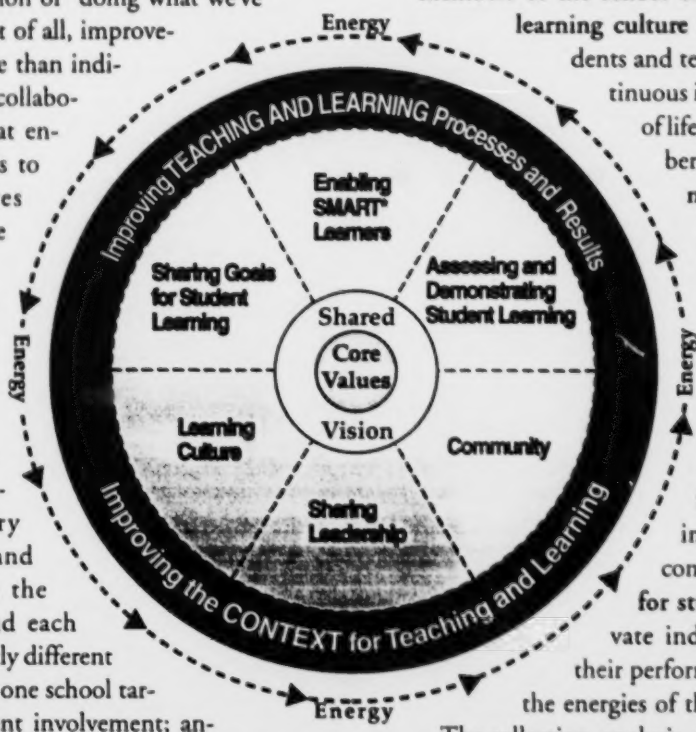
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A:

Quest Brochure and Framework for Continuous Improvement

Quest for Quality Learning Communities
A Program for Continuous School Improvement

School improvement is challenging work; to be effective, it must be continuous. Improvement is not a single act or program; it is a process of always wanting to learn more about how better to help all students achieve at higher levels. Improvement is visionary; it involves risk-taking, uncertainty, and a rejection of "doing what we've always done." Most of all, improvement requires more than individual effort: it is a collaborative endeavor that engages and responds to the diverse voices within an entire community.



Teams from 20 schools in a four-state region now collaborate with staff from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to study and learn together in the Quest project, and each school takes a slightly different path. For example, one school targets increased parent involvement; another hopes to raise the level of student thinking through teachers' working together and coaching one another; a high school improves teaching by listening to what students say about how they learn best; other schools focus on specific curriculum areas such as writing or science education.

The Quest framework unifies their thinking about school improvement. These **core values** offer a blueprint for continuous progress: ongoing questioning of practice, high expectations for all, individual responsibility for better performance, collegial sharing and support, and thoughtful reflection on practice.

Stemming from these values is a clearly defined **vision** of student excellence that is shared by all members of the school community. A strong **learning culture** encourages both students and teachers to choose continuous improvement as a way of life in their school. Members of the **school community** connect to one another through a shared commitment to improved learning conditions for all. **Shared leadership** encourages and enables everyone to assume responsibility for making a positive impact on the school community. **Shared goals for student learning** motivate individuals to improve their performance and help focus the energies of the entire community.

The collection, analysis, and **use of student assessment data** sustains continuous improvement, providing a measure of the effectiveness of the community's efforts. SMART learners are Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful. Fully equipped to become lifelong learners, they are ready for life and work in the 21st century. In short, continuous improvement spawns the **energy** and excitement necessary to transform a collection of individuals into a true learning community.

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Goals of the Quest Project

1. ***Connect* with colleagues.** By serving on a Quest leadership team, participants connect with others on their school team, forming bonds that enhance working relationships. In addition, Quest teams connect with teams from other schools, districts, and states, allowing everyone to learn from others' experiences. A listserv, inquiry@ael.org, facilitates connections across the network.

2. ***Create* a learning community.** Teams become part of the Quest network learning community with the expectation of recreating this experience in their own community.

3. ***Connect* with concepts and stories related to continuous school improvement.** At Quest rallies, the Quest framework is a source of study, dialogue, and sharing among teams.

4. ***Create* personal and shared meaning.** The Quest network places a high value on processes such as reflection and dialogue, which lead to deeper understandings of continuous improvement.

5. ***Commit* to continue learning with this community.** Quest schools have made a three-year commitment to study and learn together, with a focus on improving student achievement.

What is a learning community? "Learning communities are essentially communities of inquirers . . . sustained by a continued commitment to share this journey of exploration with one another on matters people care deeply about" (Ryan, 1995).

Peter Senge et al. (1994) write that a learning organization "is a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, . . . and where people are continually learning how to learn together."

6. ***Commit* to continue the Quest back home.** The "rubber hits the road" at schools, not at Quest events. AEL helps school teams take their learnings home and apply them for the benefit of students. Site visits, called Co-Ventures in Learning, provide opportunities for AEL staff to visit each school, in order to better understand the context of that school's efforts, and tailor assistance to the school's needs.

The Quest project hopes to achieve results at three different levels:

- For individuals, sharing leadership on a Quest team leads to more reflective practice and renewed understanding of the concepts that support continuous improvement.
- For schools, Quest will provide motivation and support for ongoing and/or new school-based initiatives to improve teaching and learning.
- For the Quest network of schools, our collaborative learning and research will yield stories, insights, processes, and products—all of which will be helpful to the broader educational community.

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APPENDIX B:

Feedback Forms

Inquiry Into Improvment
Feedback Form

The rally planners would appreciate your comments based upon the first day's experience.

Learnings, insights, ah-ha's from the day...

Things that worked especially well for me...

Ways in which I contributed...

Things that would have allowed me to contribute more...

Things I want to explore further...

Things to trash...

Other comments:

Quest Elementary School Network Rally
February 22-23, 1999

Please describe how the following "worked" for you?

Demonstration of Protocol	Review of school improvement plans
Review of brain-based learning research	Use of Quest Instrument for Continuous School Improvement: Self-Scoring Profile

Now, using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes the degree to which each of the following six goals were accomplished during the rally.

5=Extremely well accomplished	3=Average	1=Not accomplished

Goal 1: To connect with colleagues	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 2: To create a learning community	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 3: To connect with concepts concerning continuous school improvement	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 4: To create personal and shared meaning	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 5: To commit to continue learning with this community	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 6: To commit to continue the Quest back home	5	4	3	2	1

Quest Elementary School Network Rally
February 22-23, 1999

Quest staff continue to be interested in your experience at Quest rallies. Won't you please take a few minutes to complete the following questions? Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential, so please feel free to be as candid as possible. Thank you!

1. In what capacity are you attending this rally? Please check one.
   ___ Teacher ___ Community member ___ Other (please specify)
   ___ Parent ___ School administrator
   ___ Student ___ Support staff

2. How many Quest events have you attended prior to this rally?

3. In what ways do you feel that you connected with colleagues at this rally?

4. Did Quest network members become more of a learning community during this rally? Give specific examples to support your answer.

5. Describe examples of specific content related to continuous school improvement with which you "connected" at the rally.

(over)

6. If you were able to create personal and shared meanings at this rally, what were 2 or 3 of these meanings?

7. To what extent do you feel committed to continuing to learn with the Quest community? For what reasons do you feel this?

8. In what ways are you committed to continuing the Quest for continuous school improvement back at your school?

APPENDIX C:

Protocol Process

The Protocol:
A Process for School Improvement Through Inquiry and Dialogue*

What is Protocol?

Protocol is an **interactive process** for engaging an entire school community in **inquiry** about the **quality of the teaching and learning** taking place at a school. The protocol is based on a set of assumptions and design principles mirroring features of powerful learning and good teaching that emerged from California Senate Bill 1274, "A Demonstration of School Restructuring in Public Education," and from the work of Joseph McDonald.

Assumptions

The following assumptions serve as the foundation for the design of the Protocol process:

- Inquiry, or asking questions, is an essential part of school improvement.
- People need help, i.e. structures and defined roles, to practice and improve their ability to engage in inquiry.
- Schools should have questions about students' performance towards standards.
- The examination of student work must be part of a school's inquiry.
- Teachers and all members of the school community need the opportunity to have honest conversations about their work and students' work.
- Feedback from multiple perspectives helps individuals and groups understand their work more fully.
- When feedback is received and used as part of ongoing relationships, there is a greater probability that the feedback will lead to action.
- Reflection is an essential tool for learning.
- When individuals are engaged in reflection about their own learning, they are more likely to take action on what they have learned.
- The Protocol is most useful in an ongoing cycle of asking questions, examining evidence of student achievement, and taking action.

This piece is reprinted from "Guidelines for the Protocol '97-'98," shared by Joel Shawn, Spring 1998, at a meeting of the School Change Collaborative in Chicago.

Benefits and Outcomes from the Protocol

The protocol:

- provides a safe setting for relective dialogue about the work and progress of schools and districts.
- helps to keep change efforts focused on the specific learning needs of students.
- provides an opportunity to demonstrate, through opebn, honest, and authentic analysis, how a school's improvement efforts have impacted student achievmeent relative to agreed upon standards.
- provides an opportunity to receive feedback on school improvement efforts.
-
-
-
-

Roles for Protocol Process

1. **Facilitator**

   keeps time, explains roles and purposes, and monitors.

2. **Analysts/Presenters**

   present information clearly and concisely; share openly their analytical reflections; be explicit about the kinds of feedback desired; listen to the feedback; accept whatever they wish (discarding the rest); and make decisions about future work, based upon feedback and their own analysis.

3. **Reactors**

   Listen attentively. Seek to understand. Ask clarifying questions when time is allotted. Attend to the questions at issue posed by analysts. Give feedback of both types: supportive statements and critical questions.

Agenda for Protocol

***Before the Protocol**

1. Determine the question around which discussion and analysis will occur.
2. Collect student work that will help you answer the question.

If it's the first time for the group to do protocol, or if the reactors and the analysts don't know one another, begin the process with an overview and introduction. Otherwise move directly to the analysis.

Overview

5 min. Facilitator welcomes the group and reviews the roles and the agenda.

Introduction

10-20 Presenters provide background information about the topic at hand. This is intended to set the context. For example, if the presenters are going to talk about student writing, they might present some background here about the state assessment instrument, how frequently students write, the kinds of prompts that are given, the length of student writing, the expectations for parent involvement, etc.

5 min. Reflectors may ask questions for clarification.

***Analysis**

15-30 min Presenters discuss with one another the problem; they give their analysis of the question or questions which were formulated before the protocol began, and for which they have collected student work to serve as evidence.

5 min Reflectors (scholars) ask brief questions for clarification.

***Feedback**

10-15 min Reflectors form small groups of 3-5 to provide feedback on the essential questions identified above. Feedback is given in two forms—warm and cool. The warm feedback is given first; these are supportive statements, accentuating the positive that was heard in the analysis. Next reflectors pose the cool feedback in the form of questions.

In a large group, the reflectors can work at table groups, posting their feedback as the analysts wander around the room listening in. In a smaller group, the reflectors can talk to one another as the analsysts listen to their discussion.

***Reflection and Next Steps**

10-15 min Presenters engage in reflection on the feedback they heard. They plan their next steps/revisions/new ideas that were triggered by their own thinking and by the feedback they heard.their thinking, etc.

Reflection/Journal Writing

5 min Presenters and reflectors record their impressions and learnings from the process.

***Debrief**

5-15 min The presenters and reflectors engage in an open conversation about the process, what they learned, what they liked or disliked about the experience, etc.

Feedback

Feedback should address the team's essential questions.

Feedback is given in two forms:

Supportive Statements

Critical questions

APPENDIX D:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
__X__ evaluation report
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
	Information Scope and Selection	X			
	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
	Cost Effectiveness	X			
	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements	X			
	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
	Disclosure of Findings	X			
	Conflict of Interest	X			
	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
	Context Analysis	X			
	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
	Valid Information	X			
	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
	Analysis of Quantitative Information	X			
	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
	Metaevaluation	X			

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